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Tanzania: Loose Politics, Courts and Dynamite Destroying the Wealth of the Nation

BY ANNE OUTWATER, 28 APRIL 2013

COLUMN

MR Hyasint Wariro, Senior Marine Technician, Fisheries Division has been in the forefront of the battle to ensure Tanzania's coastal fisheries are viable for future generations. He lost an eye and suffered other injuries when acid was thrown in his face by a dynamite seller and a dynamite fisher.

I asked him, "How does the dynamite become available for such illegal use?" Wariro explained that dynamite enters the country legally. The government approves big shipments for legitimate uses such as road construction and mining.

In Tanga, for example, there are quarries where dynamite is used. The quarry operators have received permission from the Ministry of Energy and Minerals to bring in large shipments. "But there is very loose regulation of dynamite. The consignments are so big that sometimes giving a few sticks away to a relative is no big deal. Sometimes people do not even have to buy it - somebody just gives them five or six sticks.

At any rate, it is very easy to buy dynamite. It costs between TZS. 3,000 and 8,000 a stick. The fisherman can cut one stick of dynamite into about six pieces. All they really need is the detonator and the fuse; they can add urea to make a bigger blast." Wariro further explained, "The fishermen are just poor people. Sometimes they cannot even pay for the dynamite - they get the dynamite and then give a portion of the fish afterwards to the person who fronted it... The only people really getting rich in this deal are the people selling dynamite."

I asked Wariro why dynamite fishing is not a problem in Kenya and Mozambique? He explained, "There the Fisheries officers will shoot to kill. In Tanzania we bring the people to court, which is allowance for corruption." He said, "I brought people to court who were caught dynamite fishing without any reasonable doubt. They were let off with a TZS. 20,000 fine. I went and asked a judge why he let the dynamite fishermen off - even when there was no reasonable doubt that they were guilty. The judge described liability - which is another decision."

Evidently there is a 'chama' for dynamite fishermen. They each pay 50,000 per month to be used to defend their members. "Therefore when they are arrested there is enough money to corrupt the system." "Judges are afraid. They cannot make a sentence without a judgment. The fisherman can appeal and the appeal takes place in the same court. By the time the case comes up for appeal, the files have been lost - by the clerks, by the police. Files can easily get lost in the police station and the courts. "The worse time is during elections. During elections there is no surveillance.

The officials do not even go to the areas where dynamite fishing occurs. Nobody wants to make any fuss during elections, so the dynamite fishermen go crazy and nobody will stop them." The perpetrators say, "This is my life - my sons and daughters depend on me, my family. What can I do?" Socially - including by the village chiefs, politicians in the wards the districts, the region - the perpetrators are known. "He is somebody's relative - brother-in-law, uncle, nephew. The politicians say, 'O, just let him go.'"

I asked, "How can we better conserve the resources?" He said, "Take out the politics and we can have conservation. The problem is not from lack of money. People are not ignorant of the problem. But until we drop politics from these issues we can't conserve any resources. No tree. No fish." I pushed him, "Perhaps the Marine Police do not know the importance of coral reefs for fisheries? Maybe they do not understand what is at stake? Perhaps they do not understand their job is to protect the wealth of the nation so it continues to produce forever.

Do they actually understand?" Wariro is sure they know about the importance of conserving fisheries. He said the Marine Police have to know. "But now the dynamite fishermen are frightening the 'waziri' in Zanzibar." I asked him, "What can we do to stop this scourge?" He replied, "If we are serious, we must talk to the village leaders, the leaders of the wards, districts and regions. We must educate them."

The courts have to uphold the law. As well, "Stores of dynamite should be secure from illegitimate hands." World Bank, GIZ, TANROADS is your dynamite secure? In Ngerengere is the dynamite secure? Because right now this type of "aid" is being used to destroy the nation's wealth, present and future. Quarries in Tanga, is your dynamite secure?

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